

## Rock and a Hard Place

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Summary: Sometimes tough decisions need to be made. Sometimes you just have to move on.

### Rock and a Hard Place

AN: Firstly, thank you so much for such a warm response to my comeback piece, You Know. It was lovely to see so many familiar (and a few new) names pop up to say hello. I really hadn't realised that it had been two years since I'd posted anything JAG but looking at the last story I posted, June 2014, it makes sense. That was when my mother was diagnosed with stomach cancer and our world changed forever. Sadly, mum didn't make it, passing in June 2015 and I had my then 2 year old hospitalised a few days later in the same hospital for four days and unwell for a month. So 2016 is about getting back to living and enjoying life and writing is a part of that. I certainly can't make promises as to how much I will write and I certainly won't be as prolific as before but I ask you to bear with me as I take these tentative steps back into fanfiction.

Now, secondly, I have been scrolling through my computer and I have so many scraps of stories. Some no more than a paragraph or two, some all but the ending, abandoned when I just couldn't get the story to a conclusion. And then there's this piece. Saved under the name of August 2013 June 2014 it has obviously been written in two halves. I was surprised to find that it was a finished piece but I no recollection of ever posting it. I have gone through my portfolio and cannot find it under this or any other name. If I have published it before, I can only think it was on HBX. If it is here on fanfic net and I have overlooked it, I apologise for the double up.

Thank you all once again.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Rock and a Hard Place<strong>

It didn't matter which way he argued, there was no way Harmon Rabb was going to win this particular contest. His opponent countered every argument, met every challenge and had the upper hand brought about by years more experience and the guilt factor.

"Okay, okay, mom," he conceded, throwing up his hands. "I'll do it." And with that, Harm accepted he was going to a local elementary school to give a talk on aviation.

Shaking his head, he walked out of the kitchen.

"You're not looking too happy there, son," Frank observed, coming from the den.

"How does she do it?" he asked, waving towards the kitchen.

"Do what?" he asked, folding the newspaper.

"I have one free day here after finishing my investigation today and mom has me giving a talk for the wife of one of her gallery staff," he said, shaking his head once more. "It is definitely not what I want to be doing."

"And did you tell her that?" he asked quietly.

"I tried," he replied, and he had. "Tried so many different tactics."

"What wore you down?" he questioned, knowing just how hard it was to say no to Trish when she had a bee in her bonnet.

"The 'when's the last time you've done something for me?'" he said with a sigh.

"Yep," Frank said with a chuckle. "That gets me too. As too does 'I don't ask for much' and 'Would it really hurt you to...'. "

"Well, I'd better go organise something," he said as he trudged up the stairs wondering just what he could say to a couple of dozen fourth graders on the topic of aviation.

Later that night, after dinner, Harm excused himself once more and headed up to reread the notes he'd made for the following day's presentation. While there was nothing difficult about the task at hand, he had limited experience of children and was feeling a bit daunted about being in front of a classroom. The only children he had regular contact with were the Roberts' four who were all well-behaved and who loved him. Unknown children, en masse, and not drilled in the conventions of military protocol and discipline was something else altogether.

"Harmon!" His mother's voice came from the bottom of the stairs. "Come on down. There's someone here..."

Harm rolled his eyes before standing and rolling out the tension from his neck. While he loved his mother very much, he never liked being put on display or paraded out for her friends, something which happened every time he visited. Still, he was a dutiful son who didn't visit as often as he should, as his mother had reminded him

earlier, so he headed downstairs.

A quick scan of the living room revealed no visitor and no mother, so Harm looked to Frank.

"Kitchen," he said with a grin before patting his shoulder as he passed by. While Harm thought it was an odd gesture, he smiled all the same.

Pushing the door opened, he stepped into the smaller room and Trish didn't miss the way his face lit up.

"Mac!" he exclaimed, crossing the room to greet her but stopping before he touched her. "What on earth are you doing here? Is everything alright?"

Standing from the table she had been sitting at, Mac hugged him briefly before kissing his cheek. "Hey," she said quietly. "I'm sorry to just drop by and for interrupting your time with your parents but I needed to talk to you."

"No need to apologise," he said, gesturing for her to sit once more. "You didn't come all the way from DC just to talk to me though, did you?" he asked as he pulled a chair up alongside her; his mother silently disappearing from the room.

"No, I've been at Pendleton the past 36 hours and have a flight home at 0830 tomorrow," she said while trying to stifle a yawn.

"You're tired," he said simply. No question, no judgement, just an observation.

"Yep," she replied as simply. No reassurances, no clarification.

"What's up?" Harm finally asked, taking her hand in his.

"Well..." she drawled, her eyes not quite meeting his. "Not a lot..."

Using the fingertip on his right index finger, Harm raised Mac's face and smiled sadly at her when their eyes met. "Talk to me," he said gently. "You didn't come see me just for 'not a lot'."

Smiling at him, Mac nodded. "Yeah, true..." she admitted. "You think we can take a walk along the beach? Your mom won't mind, will she?"

"Not at all," he said answering her second question first as he stood, keeping her hand in his. "Do you need a jacket?"

"No, I'm fine," she replied, following him as he headed out the back door and down through the gate which led to the beach.

Silence ensued as they walked along hand in hand. With the night unseasonably cool for La Jolla, Mac shivered a few minutes later and Harm wrapped his arm around her but said nothing. It wasn't until she spotted a large boulder she broke away from him and climbed up on it, leaving enough room for Harm to join her and he did.

"There's something I need to talk to you about," she said quietly, her eyes fixed on the ocean in front of her. "Something I felt I needed to do face-to-face...and sooner rather than later..." She knew she was rambling but she couldn't help herself. She had rehearsed this speech a few times, yet now she was in his presence, she felt tongue-tied.

Denying all his urges to demand to know what was going on and a hundred other questions waiting to be asked, Harm took a deep breath and squeezed her hand. "Whenever you're ready," he said quietly. "I'm right here."

"I've been seeing McCool again," Mac said quietly. "Lately, I've been feeling a little off-kilter ...out of sorts," she continued before sighing. "Actually, it's more a lot rather than a little."

Harm wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer but didn't speak. "It helps ...speaking to her...some of the time. No, actually it helps all the time it's just that I don't always like what she has to say." Silence fell as Mac tried to find the words to express herself. Giving her the time she seemed to need, Harm waited patiently, every one of his senses on alert trying to ascertain just what was going on with the woman alongside him.

"Well, anyway," Mac said before coughing and clearing her throat, "McCool suggested that maybe after everything that's happened to me over the past few years that maybe I would feel more settled and more at ease if I had a fresh start ... you know, transferred somewhere." She could feel Harm stiffen alongside her and his breathing change. "At first I thought it was a stupid idea. I told her that I don't run from my problems and she explained that this wasn't running. It was moving on. Putting some pretty painful things behind me rather than being reminded of them on a daily basis and the more I thought about it the more I realised she had a point ... a good point."

"I don't know what to say," Harm said, a lump constricting his throat. "I could be selfish and tell you not to go because of what it would do to me but that wouldn't be fair to you. Have you spoken General Cresswell?" Mac shook her head.

"No," she said softly. "Wanted to speak to you first."

Harm gave her a squeeze. "Um...do you know where you might be headed?"

"There's a position coming up at Pendleton which would be good. General Adam Peters called me in for an off-the-record chat. Comes with a promotion and the lifestyle here is a lot better than the east coast...well, at least the weather is," she rambled.

"Uh huh," was all he could think to say.

"Uh huh," she repeated, taking the chance to look at him and finding his gaze was on the vast ocean.

"So, um, yeah," she continued. "I'm thinking that this will be a great opportunity to put the past to rest and move on with my life."

"Sounds like you've made up your mind," he said by way of statement.

"And you know I'll support you no matter what."

As he looked down, she looked up and their eyes finally met, unshed tears glistening in both sets of eyes. "Thank you," she whispered, reaching up to caress his face. "That means so much."

"When will you...how long before..." Harm tried to ask but couldn't finish his question.

"Maybe a month," she said. "I told Peters I would give it strong consideration and give him an answer by Monday. Once I agree I'd get a timeline."

"So soon," he said in a whisper.

"Yeah, but um...well, there's something else," she said edgily, shifting on the boulder to look at him. "And don't think you're under any obligation but I said I would tell you so...well, here it is..."

Harm took both her hands in his and gave a gentle squeeze. "Just take your time," he said, trying to ease her discomfit.

"General Peters has a brother, Admiral Aaron Peters who is based at Coronado," she said and Harm nodded.

"Yeah, I met him a couple of years ago," Harm said with a nod. "Made some joke about him being better than his brother as he was Navy."

"Yeah, the General made the same joke; must run in the family," Mac said. "Anyway, they had dinner together a couple of nights ago and the General mentioned I was at Pendleton and he was going to talk to me about a position. The Admiral thought it was good timing because he had a position which would be perfect for my husband."

Harm's eyebrows shot up and Mac smirked. "Obviously he meant you," she confirmed. "The position is a combination of law and aviation. Thought it would be up your alley. I did explain to the General that you were not my husband and he just laughed and said good as mixed marriages never work."

"Mixed marriages?" Harm said, his mind all over the place.

"Yeah, the Peters' father was a marine, his mother's family was all Navy, he said there were lots of arguments over the years especially at family gatherings," she explained, resting against him once more. "Look all that's inconsequential at the moment. I told Peters I would see you today and let you know that his brother would be eager to see you ASAP to sound you out about the possibilities of the position."

He nodded then nodded again.

"Of course," she continued. "Whether you took this position or not is solely up to you and I wouldn't expect you to take it just because I'll be here and even if you did it doesn't have to change our current relationship and ..."

Saying a silent prayer, Harm took a chance, leant down and kissed

her. A gentle, soft, tender kiss aimed at quietening her. When he pulled back he was glad to see a smile on her face.

"Do I get a chance to speak?" he asked with a grin and Mac nodded. "Firstly, thank you for telling me about the position, I will contact Admiral Peters in the morning and arrange a meeting...see what he is offering and then be able to make an informed decision. Secondly, and probably most importantly, making a move is something that has been on my mind for a long time now and this seems to be the kick in the pants I needed to do it."

"You were already thinking of transferring?" Mac asked shaking her head. "I didn't know."

"No, not transferring, making a move," he reiterated and Mac's brows furrowed in confusion. "Making a move," he repeated and kissed her again and again.

"Oh, that sort of move," Mac said in a breathless sigh once they had separated.

"Yeah, that sort of move," he said. "I think it is long overdue and if we both end up here I would like us to be together. You know, being a couple, living together, loving each other..."

"I like your thinking," she said with a grin. "I'd like those things too."

"And if these transfers don't work out for one or both of us, I would still like those things anyway," he said, caressing her face. "I'm done living my life in fear of not going for what I want. I want you. I want happily ever after with you. I want an eternity with you..."

"Me too," Mac replied, wiping away the tears rolling down his cheek. "I love you very much, Harmon."

"I love you too, Sarah," echoed before he kissed her once more.

Then, as he slid from the boulder, and moved to one knee, Mac realised what he was going to do. "Oh, no, no, no," she said, tugging his arm to get him to stand once more.

"But...I mean, I thought that..." he tried to speak but the words weren't coming freely.

"I do..." she said, caressing his face. "I want the proposal and the marriage and eternity, I really do," she soothed. "I kinda...well, I would like a courtship. I know it's old-fashioned but I don't want to go from just friends to engaged in the course of one 27 minute conversation."

Harm's relieved smile spread easily across his face. "Guess I just figured we'd actually had a nine year courtship...that we could just jump ahead..."

"I understand you're thinking," she said with a nod. "But for us to get the eternity we want, here in California, there's a lot that has to happen in a very short time. I just think it's more feasible to

concentrate on the practicalities now and then when we're settled concentrate on the romance...besides I don't want a long engagement. I've waited long enough for you."

"If we're putting romance on the backburner until we're settled here, and I understand your reasoning, does that mean all forms of romance?" he questioned and Mac's brow furrowed. "I guess I'm asking that if we're going the old-fashioned courtship way does that also include practicing abstinence?"

"Hell no," she replied, pulling him impossibly close and kissing him. "I calculate we've had about 8.5 years of foreplay," she said with a sly grin. "And I know I am contradicting myself but ...well...I think I'm done waiting."

"But, Mac," he protested weakly. "I'm an old-fashioned kinda guy and don't believe in sex before marriage."

"So all those women...?" Mac said raising an eyebrow.

"Well, yes, but I never had sex with them before I married them," he scoffed lightheartedly.

"That's because you never married them," she replied quickly.

"That's right," he said, kissing her cheek. "I was saving myself for you."

"Well, if you really want to wait..." she said as she slid off the boulder and started back towards the Burnett's residence. "I can too ... what's another couple of months?"

Considering he had first fantasised about making love with Sarah MacKenzie the week he met her, there was no way he was going to wait another second. With two giant strides, he'd caught up and grabbed her elbow spinning her to him.

"Can't wait another minute for you," he whispered hoarsely before devouring her in a kiss full of love, passion and undeniable urgency.

"So I can tell," Mac managed when they'd finally come up for air as she gently thrust forward. "Well, I'm already checked into the Manchester Grand Hyatt, you're more than welcome to join me," she uttered as he peppered kisses across her face.

"Oh, I'm there," he said, walking backwards towards his parents, his lips still attached to her.

Within metres of the path back to the Burnett house, Mac stopped him as reality kicked in.

"Look, Harm," she said, bracing her hands on his chest. "The offer definitely still stands..."

"But..." he supplied, his stomach dropping at the possibility of what she was about to say.

"But...you don't get to see your parents often..." she said,

gesturing towards the house. "And I don't want to come between..."

"Damn," he muttered, shaking his head, not only were his parents a consideration tonight but he had made the commitment to his mother to do the elementary school presentation and, while he knew Mac had said she had an 0830 flight he was intending to do everything in his power to see they would spend the next few days naked and horizontal; with the exception of his meeting at Coronado. "No," he said, shaking his head again. "Leave my folks to me. I am sure once I explain that I need to leave immediately so I can work on being transferred here permanently, they will forgive me anything."

Upon returning to the Burnett's, Mac excused herself to use the bathroom while Harm spoke to Frank and Trish. He didn't come right out and say he needed to leave so they could finally have sex but then, he didn't need to. Both had seen the younger couple at different times on the beach and the passion was unmistakable. Before Trish could say anything, Harm continued, "I know you're disappointed, mom, but we could be living here within a couple of months ... and that can only happen if I meet with Admiral Peters tomorrow at Coronado."

"Go, go," she said, ushering him towards the steps so he could collect his belongings. "Sooner you go the sooner you'll be back..." she added.

Driving the rental car towards the hotel, the conversation was kept to matters of recent cases and travel plans.

"Well, I booked this room for a night as I thought I deserved a night of luxury ... you know, spa, room service, king-sized bed," Mac said. "But I don't have to be back at HQ until Monday morning, so I could be persuaded to reschedule my flight until Sunday..."

"And what will I have to do to persuade you?" Harm asked, chancing a glance at her.

"Promise me that, except for plans with Peters, it will just be you and me and that king-sized bed," she said with a sly smile.

"Oh, I definitely promise that!"

"I'm glad you always keep your promises," she replied with a grin. "Well, nearly all of them."

Knowing exactly which one she was referring to, Harm grinned. "That was only through lack of opportunity. Now that I will have that opportunity, I aim to make good on 'that' promise."

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><p>"It's not as big as I expected," Mac said with a curious glance.<p>

"Is that a bad thing?" Harm replied a little perturbed.

"No," she answered with a shake of her head. "I guess it will still do the job."

"You don't sound too enthusiastic, Mac," he said, his hands moving to his hips.

"I am, I am," she said, crossing the room to him. "I just had this vision in my mind and this wasn't it."

"If you're not happy about..." he started but Mac kissed him into silence.

"I am extremely happy," she said, caressing his face. "You found the perfect house for us. Yes, it's smaller than I expected but it has so much potential."

"That's what I thought," he agreed, wrapping his arms around her. "With renovations and an extension, this place could be whatever we want it to be."

Mac grinned widely and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Who'd have thought that it was only seven weeks ago we sat on that boulder and talked about the move west. And now, here we are ... with our first home in Encinitas ... establishing ourselves in our new positions ..."

"Now, I kept my promise about just being us that first weekend at the Manchester Grand Hyatt," he said, kissing her forehead. "And I kept my promise and focused on all the practicalities and logistics instead of romance, so we could put our efforts into getting here. What do you say we now allow ourselves that 'us' time? That old-fashioned courtship? That proposal?" he asked before kissing her cheeks.

"Um," she replied biting her lower lip. "Us time sounds very good. Proposal sounds very good," she managed as he trailed kisses along the column of her throat.

"And the old-fashioned courtship?" he murmured before sucking on her pulse point. "Mac?" he prompted pulling back when she hadn't replied.

"Concept of it would be great," she said, caressing his face. "But I'm ready to be the mother of your child and your wife." She framed his face in both her hands and kissed him gently.

"I would love that," he whispered, kissing her back. "Of course, the old-fashioned way would be wife then mother."

Mac nodded. "Well," she said slowly. "You have just over seven months to marry me or I will be a mother first."

"Okay," he said with a nod before the words registered. "Seven months?"

"Yep," she said with a growing smile. "Seems you only needed one opportunity to make good on 'that' promise."

"You're pregnant?" he asked, even though he knew this was what she was telling him.

"Yes, we're pregnant, daddy," she said, the smile never fading. "Now, are you ready to be a husband as well?"

"Oh, definitely," he replied. "Definitely, definitely, definitely."

After he had kissed her a dozen times, Harm pulled back and dropped to one knee. Sliding his hand into his pocket, he produced a small black box and opened it.

"Sarah MacKenzie," he said taking one of her hands in his. "For far too long we've walked around each other in circles. Revolving, orbiting, rotating but always on our own path. I have known for a very long time that the only true path in this life for me was the one which saw us walking alongside each other. My heart, my soul, my life is forever entwined with yours. You have always been my destiny. You will be my eternity. Sarah, I love you more than you could ever imagine. More than I can even comprehend. And the thought that you are now pregnant with my child fills my heart in a way I didn't know was possible. For the days, months, years ahead, I would like to ask you if you would you would honour me by becoming my wife?"

"I will," she whispered tearfully as he dropped her hand and retrieved the ring from its velvet home.

"I love you so very much, Mac," Harm said as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

"I love you so very much too, Harm," Mac echoed as she helped him to his feet before wrapping her arms around his neck. "I can't even begin to find words to describe how much I love you and how much you mean to me. Like you, I believed this was our destiny but I never really believed it would happen. It all seemed too good to be true but now we're here, together, in love ... engaged ... pregnant ... I finally believe that anything is possible and that we will have our eternity."

Life on the west coast was far removed from their east coast existence. With the sunnier days and warmer climes came happiness, contentment and a true sense of family; one that neither had experienced before. McCool's advice about moving on had been the best advice Mac had ever received. No longer had she felt she was living in the shadows and going through the motions. She was living life to the fullest and to make things better, she was living it with her husband and their baby boy.

In years to come, Harm would often muse that this turn of events happened because of very difficult lives and a conversation on a boulder on the beach. Defying the adage, their well-deserved happy and perfect life happened because of a rock and a hard place.

End  
file.